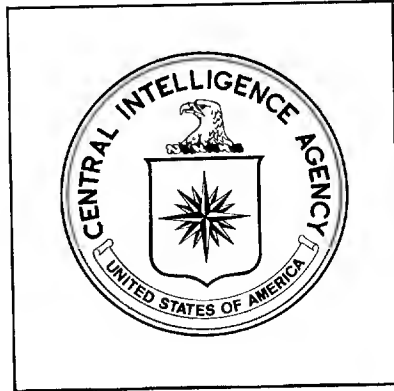


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STAFF NOTES:

Developments in Indochina

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143

25X1

February 4, 1975

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

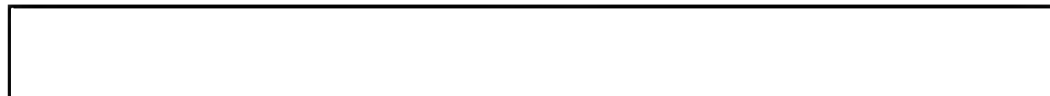


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CONTENTS

February 4, 1975

NORTH VIETNAM



25X1

Salami Tactics Advocated for South. 5

SOUTH VIETNAM

New Military Region 3 Commander 6

A Political Roundup 7

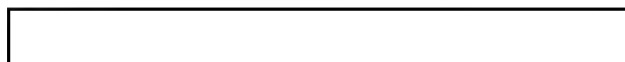
LAOS



25X1

Slow Progress on Boundary 11

Unsettled Situation in Ban Houei Sai. 15



25X1

NORTH VIETNAM

Much Smoke but Little Substance
on Reserve Moves

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Several of Hanoi's seven reserve divisions in North Vietnam appear to be stirring, but the evidence is not yet convincing that any combat units have moved south or that they will indeed cross into South Vietnam.

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Still At Home

While each of these actions could point to a change in status or a major move [redacted] there is no evidence that any of them have actually relocated.

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February 4, 1975

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While no units have been detected shifting, this does not necessarily mean that units have not moved. Information on troop movements is less reliable than earlier in the war, and in any large commitment of forces, a few North Vietnamese units probably could transit the infiltration corridor undetected.

25X1

February 4, 1975

-3-

25X1

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Salami Tactics Advocated for the South
[redacted]

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A recent, unattributed article in the North Vietnamese army paper, *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, has provided further evidence on Communist plans for the present dry-season campaign.

The article calls for "coordinated" local offensives, with political and military forces playing varying roles of importance, depending on the situation in each area. The emphasis seems clearly to limit the scope of these offensive actions. The article states that the key military element should be the "local forces," occasionally supplemented by main force units. It also notes that such coordinated political and military attacks should take place only "in a certain area and within a fixed time."

The concept of a "coordinated offensive" seems based on a recognition that Saigon, faced with serious supply constraints, will not be able to defend all the areas under its control. In this respect, the article is realistic in assessing the present balance of political and military forces in South Vietnam. It decries as a mistake attacks on areas where Saigon is strong and in a position to maul Communist forces, calling instead for strikes only in those regions where there is a good chance of making gains.

As well as expanding the Communists' area of control, the "coordinated offensive" seems designed to keep South Vietnamese regular army units tied down and unable to carry out "pacification" operations against important Communist base areas. The writer emphasizes the importance of "consolidating the liberated areas"--a phrase which indicates the importance of protecting base areas while preparing for larger scale offensives. [redacted]

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February 4, 1975

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SOUTH VIETNAM

New Military Region 3 Commander
[REDACTED]

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Lt. General Nguyen Van Toan has been assigned as the new Military Region 3 (MR-3) commander and will reportedly assume the position on February 5.

General Toan will replace Lt. General Du Quoc Dong, who was appointed commander of MR-3 only last October. The loss of Phuoc Long Province and the failure of his forces to retake the top of Ba Den Mountain last month undoubtedly contributed to his downfall. Dong had been under criticism from much of the regional staff almost from the day he took over as commander.

The choice of General Toan to succeed Dong was a difficult decision for President Thieu. Toan was accused of corruption throughout his tenure as 2nd Division commander (from 1967 to 1972) and subsequently as commander of MR-2; he was relieved of the MR-2 assignment last October during the same shake-up that brought Dong to MR-3.

Nevertheless, General Toan has an admirable military record, and Thieu may feel he is the man best qualified for the job at a time when new Communist initiatives are expected around Saigon. Toan is probably the most aggressive of the candidates available, and Thieu undoubtedly feels that this is the quality needed now.

[REDACTED]



Lt. General Nguyen Van Toan (l.)

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February 4, 1975

A Political Roundup

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25X1 Political opposition groups are still having difficulty agreeing on common issues and tactics. The report [redacted] that Buddhist and Catholic oppositionists had jointly sponsored a resolution in the Senate was incorrect. Although such a resolution was presented at a meeting in Saigon on January 26, it was never offered for formal consideration in the legislature or jointly sponsored by Catholic oppositionists.

Moreover, the Buddhist National Reconciliation Force last weekend refused to back Father Thanh and the Catholic anti-corruption movement's second "public indictment" against President Thieu for "high crimes against the state and military."

The appearance of Father Thanh's "indictment" in nine Saigon newspapers led the government to confiscate the editions that carried the story. Saigon's actions in arresting 15 journalists this week and in shutting down five newspaper offices was not related to the confiscation episode, but based on government evidence connecting the journalists to the Viet Cong.

25X1 President Thieu is obviously prepared to accept the bad publicity that such actions will inevitably generate in order to deal with what he considers potentially serious threats to his government. [redacted]

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The government is currently also having problems with the Hoa Hao religious sect. Recent government actions against the Hoa Hao have apparently

February 4, 1975

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been motivated by Thieu's concern that the group might try to negotiate a local truce with the Communists. Another religious sect--the Cao Dai--had already publicly expressed an intent to do so, and the government was worried that if such independent actions were tolerated, Saigon's authority in the countryside would be seriously undermined. Moreover, the Communists could point to such actions as further support for their claims of being a viable governmental alternative to the Thieu regime.

The Hoa Hao have consistently opposed the Communists, and their areas have been among the most secure in the country. Defense of Hoa Hao lands and property has been handled largely by indigenous security units loosely organized into an "army." While they lack heavy weapons and could not be considered a major military force, the Hoa Hao nonetheless have amassed a large number of small weapons and have armed several thousand of their claimed 3 million members. Moreover, the government has traditionally allowed the Hoa Hao to operate fairly freely in their own areas, contributing to the Hoa Hao sense of independence and autonomy. Attempts to disarm the Hoa Hao have reportedly been resisted by force.

February 4, 1975

-8-

25X1

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Slow Progress on Boundary

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Field representatives of the coalition government's Joint Central Commission, after establishing seven cease-fire markers in December, have reverted to their customary slower pace. One marker, at Ban Pong in the far northwest, was implanted during January.

Fourteen of the 27 markers called for in the protocol to the cease-fire agreement are now in place, but they establish zones of influence across only about 250 miles of the Laotian countryside. The 13 markers yet to be located will separate the forces of the two sides along a front more than 500 miles long.

On January 28, one of the commission's joint mobile teams was supposed to be sent to the Phou Soung - Na Nan area in Xiangkhoang Province to locate the first of six markers to be established in that province. The Phou Soung marker will be near the junction of Route 13 (a major all-weather road that connects the twin capitals of Vientiane and Luang Prabang) and Route 7 (the main road serving the strategically important Plaine des Jarres).

Negotiations on this marker may proceed relatively rapidly. A large number of refugees reportedly have decided to return to their native village in this general region, and are awaiting formal demarcation of the cease-fire line. The Pathet Lao want the refugees to return and may facilitate a quick settlement.

Agreement on the location of the five remaining stakes, however, will be more difficult. The rugged terrain to the south and southwest of the Plaine des Jarres was some of the most bitterly

February 4, 1975

-11-

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● Boundary markers already planted
○ Boundary markers remaining to be planted

0 100 MILES

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contested territory in the fighting, and both sides will be reluctant to yield any of it. As has occurred in areas of southern Laos and at Hongsa in the northwest, small-scale skirmishes could well break out as each side tries to improve its position before final emplacement of the cease-fire stakes.

A joint mobile team is also scheduled to begin demarcation of the area along Route 13, the major north-south highway in Laos, between Thakhek and Paksane, in the central panhandle. The section between the two cities has been under Communist control since the cease-fire and closed to general traffic. It is also an area where until fairly recently, North Vietnamese troops were building and repairing roads to help the local Pathet Lao strengthen their control over the area. The protocol calls for two markers to be established in this area: one at Khoua Soung Hong and another at Kouan Pha Vang. The Pathet Lao apparently now feel that their position in the area is strong enough to move ahead with demarcation. Once the two stakes are planted, the Communists will probably open Route 13 between Thakhek and Paksane; this would please local farmers and students who have been calling for such a move.

More Markers Needed?

In addition to the 27 temporary cease-fire markers specified in the protocol, at least 2 more may be needed to assure complete and formal separation of the forces of the two sides. In southern Laos, the line separating the two zones extends to Ban Boun but not beyond. Another marker needs to be established on the border with either Thailand or Cambodia. The Pathet Lao will probably press to have the line run from the Ban Boun marker due west to the Thai border. There is a government-controlled enclave south of Ban Boun, however, and the Vientiane side undoubtedly will demand at least some access rights to it.

February 4, 1975

25X1

A similar situation exists in the extreme northwest, where the line of separation runs to the Ban Pong marker but not beyond to the Thai or Burmese border. Unlike the situation in the south, however, the non-Communists have little influence beyond Ban Pong. If the line is eventually extended, it will probably run southwest from Ban Pong to a point on the Thai border just north of the provincial capital of Ban Houei Sai.

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February 4, 1975

-14-

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Unsettled Situation in Ban Houei Sai

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Six weeks have passed since military disorder broke out in and around the non-Communist controlled provincial capital of Ban Houei Sai, in remote north-western Laos, and the situation still has not returned to normal. Rebellious Royal Lao Army and Pathet Lao troops who forcibly occupied the town on December 24 are still active throughout the area. The non-Communists have failed to re-establish an effective political or military presence, and unless they are prepared to write off the area, they must soon take decisive steps to reassert authority and control.

Pathet Lao Activities

Pathet Lao troops are believed to be still occupying a number of Mekong River villages in the non-Communist zone which they seized at the time the town of Ban Houei Sai was occupied. They are also militarily active in the town itself, although their presence is less visible than during the initial stages of the uprising.

Small Pathet Lao propaganda teams continue to operate throughout the Ban Houei Sai area. Making house-to-house "calls," they claim that Pathet Lao troops joined in the rebellion in late December at the request of dissident Royal Lao Army leader Captain Changsouk to provide "security" for his rebel troops. They attempt to build up Changsouk as a "new revolutionary leader," and portray him as the only man on the scene who dared to stand up to the "corrupt elements" who formerly controlled the civil and military apparatus in the provincial capital.

February 4, 1975

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Lao Communist political "administrators" also are active in and around Ban Houei Sai, and appear to be on the verge of filling the leadership vacuum left by the non-Communists. These political operatives are conducting household surveys throughout the area, have established a dispensary in one village and a granary in another, have put restrictions on the movements of villagers, and have attempted to entice refugees to resettle in the Pathet Lao zone. Moreover, with the help of representatives of the coalition government's Joint Central Commission who were dispatched to Ban Houei Sai to help negotiate rebel demands, the Pathet Lao have succeeded in opening up road and river traffic between the provincial capital and various Communist-held areas in northwestern Laos.

Non-Communists at Loose Ends

Ranking non-Communist officials--master practitioners of the art of self-deception--profess to believe that the situation in the Ban Houei Sai area is somehow returning to normal of its own accord, and that little if any effort on their part is required. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The most disturbing aspect of the present state of affairs in Ban Houei Sai is the complete absence of non-Communist civilian administrators. Not one of the civil servants who fled at the outset of last year's occupation has yet returned or been replaced. The non-Communists did attempt to find a replacement for the governor of Houa Khong Province whose ouster the Ban Houei Sai rebels demanded, but their choice--the notoriously corrupt and recently fired governor of Khammouane Province in central Laos--generated a highly negative local reaction, and he has been dropped from consideration. The post remains unfilled.

General Vannaseng, the northwest military region deputy commander, represents the only element of cohesion the non-Communists have in Ban Houei

February 4, 1975

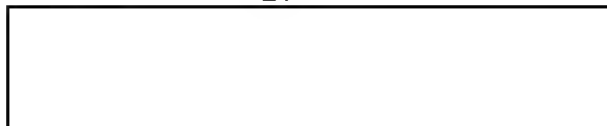
Sai, and he is slowly restoring some semblance of Royal Lao Army command in and around the town. Royal Lao Army units, nearly all of whom scattered to the four winds at the first sign of trouble in the area, are now at only one half to two thirds of their authorized strength. Almost half of their inventory of some 1,100 M-16 rifles is unaccounted for. Some of the missing weapons have probably been sold to buyers in Thailand and Burma, and others are almost certainly in Pathet Lao hands. Vannaseng did manage to negotiate the return of two artillery pieces and several recoilless rifles which the Pathet Lao took from Ban Houei Sai during the early stages of the rebellion.

Vannaseng has attempted to reach some sort of understanding with the rebellious Royal Lao Army forces who participated in the uprising. He has appointed rebel leader Changsouk to be one of the two deputy commanders of the Ban Houei Sai military subdivision, and he has agreed to permit Changsouk's forces to remain in the capital--at least for the time being. [REDACTED]

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February 4, 1975

-17-



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